

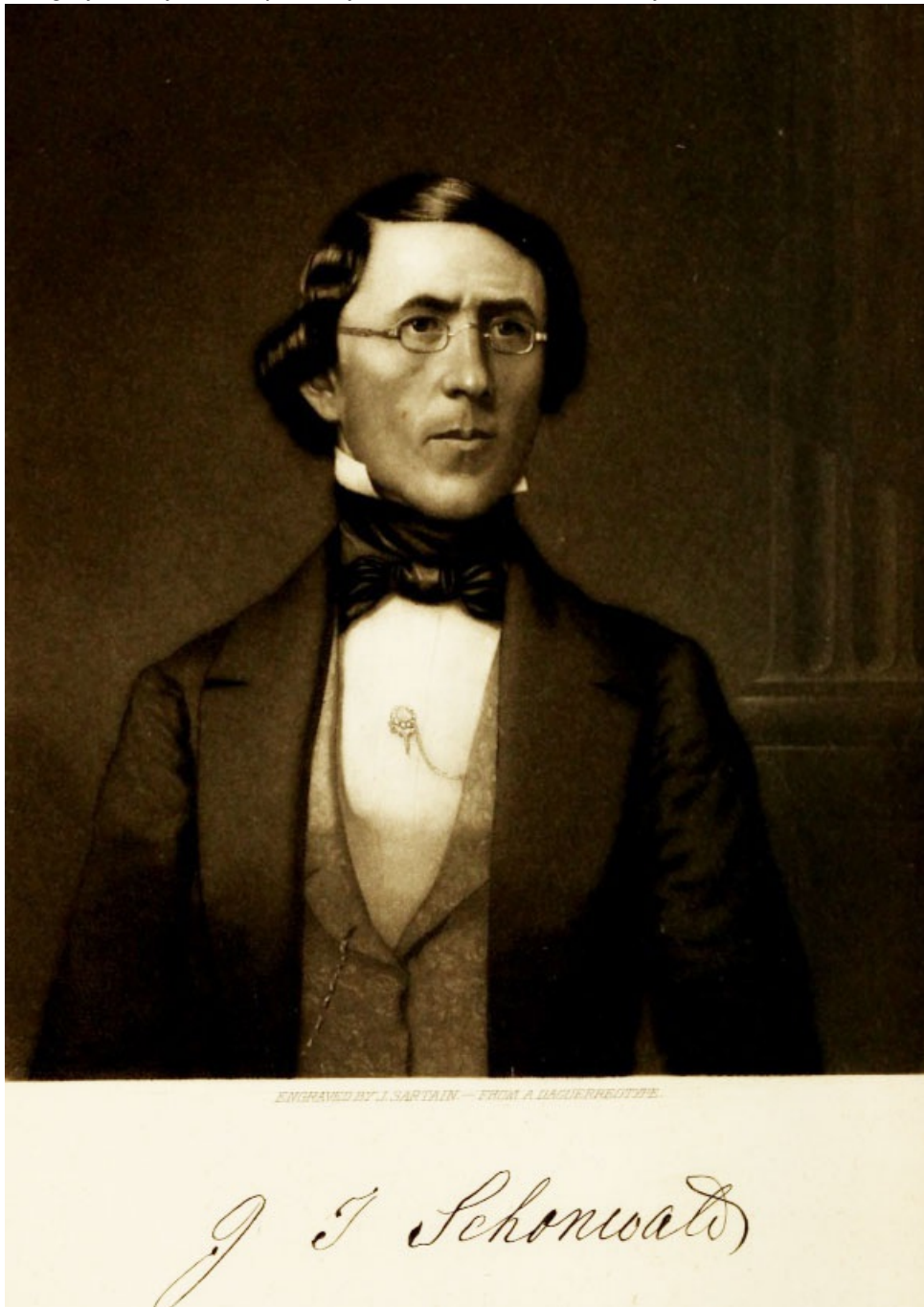
Schonwald, Johann (or John, Janos, James) Tossy ^[1]

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by William S. Powell, 1994; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, July 2023

23 Nov. 1801–29 Aug. 1882

Johann (or John Schonwald, Janos, physician, was born near Budapest, Hungary, reputedly of "a noble family of pure Magyar stock," although there now appears to be no trace of such a family. His obituary noted that he was a surgeon in the Austrian army before immigrating to America in 1836. He first settled in New York City but afterwards resided in Baltimore, Md., before finally moving to [Wilmington](#) ^[2], N.C., in 1840. Descendants relate two traditional accounts as to why he left home. One says that his parents died while he was in the army and his older brothers defrauded him of his portion of the inheritance. He deserted the family and took as his surname Schonwald, the name of the estate in northern Hungary; as a youth he probably was known as Janos Tossy.



L. A. Wollenweber. Presented on Hathitrust Digital Library.

^[3]

According to the second story, on one occasion he and a fellow officer went to the La Scala theater in Milan, Italy. Both

officers had had too much wine and when an attractive lady occupied a box across the theater from them, Tossy (or Schonwald) stood up and rudely gazed at her. She happened to be a friend of the other officer, and Schonwald's action provoked a fight in which he was stabbed in the throat. Schonwald killed his fellow officer and fled in disgrace, having been disowned by his family. A granddaughter of Dr. Schonwald remembered that he wore a silver tube in his throat and spoke in a high-pitched voice.

Although the name Tossy can be found around Budapest, and an estate named Schonwald was known in the early nineteenth century, research in Budapest in 1981 disclosed no documentary sources to support the traditions concerning his military service.

It is related that Schonwald, homesick for contact with his countrymen, went to Wilmington when he heard that a disabled ship with a Hungarian crew and captain had put into port. There was sickness aboard and no one in the town could communicate with the crew. Since he spoke English, French, German, and Italian as well as Hungarian, he was soon happily settled in Wilmington as the port doctor. In the absence of quarantine laws, it was the doctor's custom to meet incoming ships and clear them for entry. As an army surgeon, he understood the treatment of various fevers and put this knowledge to good use in treating sailors suffering from the epidemics of fevers that raged in those days.

On 31 Dec. 1849 Schonwald married Catharine Joyner, of Myrtle Grove, who was of Scot-Irish descent. They were the parents of John Tossy, Alice, Carolina (Carrie), Fanny Cornelia, and twins, Jackson and Lee, born in 1864. The infant Lee died and Jackson was given his name, becoming Jackson Lee Schonwald. There are numerous descendants of these children, with the name John occurring for several generations; three of them are physicians.

In 1851 Schonwald published a 250-page book, *The Child. A Treatise on the Diagnosis and Treatment of the Diseases of Children, According to the Simple Laws of Nature, Without Medicaments* [4]. Printed in Philadelphia, it was dedicated to the wife of the governor, Mrs. David S. (Henrietta W.) Reid. A copy specially bound in purple velvet with brass trim for Mrs. Reid is in the North Carolina Collection in Chapel Hill [5]. Following the author's name on the title page is his degree: "Dr. M. from Hungary, Practical Physician and Accoucheur, Member of the Botanical Faculty of the Hydro-therapeutical Institute of Vienna." Schonwald was buried in the Joyner family cemetery at Myrtle Grove.

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Subjects:

Biographies [13]

Physicians, Dentists, Pharmacists, and other Medical Professionals [14]

Authors:

Powell, William S. [15]

Origin - location:

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